



Revolutionising Women's Health: A Call for Collaboration and Innovation

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Dame Lesley Regan, Women's Health Ambassador for England, delivered a presentation highlighting the need for a women's health strategy during an informative session focusing on women's health technology at the Global Innovation and New Technology (GIANT) Health Event 2023, London, UK. Regan emphasised the historical neglect of women's health within the medical field and the disparities in healthcare access and outcomes. Despite women constituting 51% of the population and 49% of the workforce, their health has not received the attention it deserves, Regan stated.

DRIVING CHANGE IN THE UK

Regan began by pointing out the existing variations in healthcare access, highlighting the government's 'levelling up' initiative aimed at addressing disparities. She stressed the urgent need for a shift towards preventive healthcare, highlighting the imbalances in spending, with a disproportionate focus on disease intervention rather than prevention. Data from mid-2023 highlighted these differences, with 124 billion GBP being spent treating disease, compared to 12 billion GBP on prevention. Regan petitioned the 'tech giants' in the room to aid in pushing the preventative agenda, calling for a life course approach to women's health that addresses health needs in each decade.

Results of a public consultation that received over 100,000 responses, revealed that women felt unheard, lacked access to information, and faced challenges in accessing suitable healthcare. Specifically, 84% of respondents felt they were not adequately listened to; a significant number of people were disappointed by the way menopause was catered for; and just one in five women felt supported by the services available. The proposed Women's Health Strategy, the first influential women's health report, aimed to address these issues, as well

as priorities for the first year focusing on creating women's health hubs, improving information provision, supporting access to women's health in the workplace, and addressing pregnancy loss and fertility treatment access.

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Regan shared the success of virtual health hubs, emphasising their potential to enhance efficiency, reduce inequalities, and support the National Health Service (NHS) workforce by creating 'one stop shops'. The health hubs are already established in 42 integrated care systems, supported by women's health champions. Further success was achieved surrounding menopause care, with women now able to access 1 year of hormone replacement therapy for the price of a single prescription.

In her closing remarks, Regan made a call for equity in women's healthcare and encouraged advocacy for change, emphasising that a willingness to try different approaches is crucial for better outcomes.



INSIGHTS FROM EXPERTS: STRATEGIES FOR INNOVATION IN WOMEN'S HEALTH

Regan then invited several field experts, amongst whom were reproductive scientists, medical school founders, and CEOs of biotech companies, to join her for a panel discussion. Stephen Smith, former Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Cambridge University, UK; and former Dean of the School of Medicine at Imperial College, London, UK, began by referring to his research focusing on menstrual dysfunction and gynaecological problems. Asif Ahmed, Founder and Executive Chairman of MirZyme Therapeutics, Birmingham, UK, previously worked to identify two protective mechanisms to prevent pre-eclampsia. Finally, Teodora Popa, Programme Director of the MSc for Reproductive Science and Women's Health, University College London, UK, outlined her ongoing research projects focusing on genetics. Specifically, Popa's research on genetic differences between male and female embryos, challenges assumptions in the field. Findings suggest females are at a disadvantage even before birth in the fertility sector, as male embryos are more favourably selected during *in vitro* fertilisation, suggesting 'biology is sexist'.

One of the primary missions of the panel was to address barriers hindering meaningful progress in women's health. A notable challenge is the fragmentation in women's health services, which necessitates the integration of different sectors to provide comprehensive and cohesive care. Further challenges, specific to the NHS,

included high-tech integration. Due to being free at the point of access and significant funding issues, the panellists stressed that the NHS cannot compete with biotechnology companies. Therefore, these sectors must work together to implement real change.

Listening to patients, especially women, was underscored as a critical aspect of healthcare delivery and medical education. The importance of education in women's health, particularly in fertility awareness, was stressed. Addressing fertility education could be a key strategy to potentially prevent a significant number of *in vitro* fertilisation cases through increased understanding that fertility is finite. Education, both for healthcare professionals and the general public, is a fundamental step in overcoming these barriers. Integrating women's health education into schools and promoting early awareness are key strategies in ensuring better understanding of fertility.

The panellists emphasised the need to increase innovation and investment in women's health. They stressed that collaboration with private industries, including big companies, specifically, will be the most successful approach. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of addressing conditions like pre-eclampsia through digital diagnostics and health transformation. The panel revisited the recently announced 25 billion GBP investment in women's health hubs, expressing hope for positive outcomes within a 2-year period. Emphasising early intervention, particularly in schools, the panel underscored the importance

of normalising health check-ups and awareness. They welcomed small businesses and innovation, urging collaboration and participation in health hubs. The panel also encouraged universities to play a role in promoting student engagement with business and innovation. A suggestion was made to incorporate business-oriented components into medical school curricula. In summary, the panel proposed changing mindsets in healthcare and education, and integrating health hubs as strategies to actively improve women's health services.

CONCLUSION

Further questions from the audience centred around strategies to integrate tech and innovation into medical education, and normalising sex education in schools. In conclusion, the discussion called for continued advocacy, collaboration, and innovation to overcome barriers and advance women's health. This panel discussion offered a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities in women's health, highlighting the need for an holistic approach, education, and collaborative efforts to drive meaningful progress. ●

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